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THE  
*SPECULATIONS*  
OF  
"THE OLD PHILOSOPHER"  
LAU - TSZE,  

---

*Chalmers*

✓  
Jut. 3.58.





# TAU TĚH KING.



THE SPECULATIONS  
ON  
METAPHYSICS, POLITY, AND MORALITY,  
OF  
“THE OLD PHILOSOPHER,”

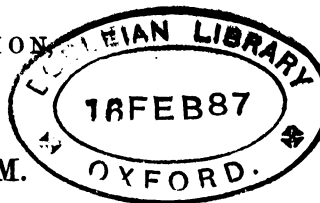
LAU-TSZE,

TRANSLATED FROM THE CHINESE,

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

JOHN CHALMERS, A.M.



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“Three precious things I prize and hold fast—*Humility*,  
*Compassion*, and *Economy*.”—LAU-TSZE.

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1868.

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THE REV. JAMES LEGGE, D.D.,

IN AFFECTIONATE ACKNOWLEDGMENT

OF GREAT OBLIGATIONS,

THIS TRANSLATION OF THE TAU TEH KING IS INSCRIBED.



## INTRODUCTION.

I VENTURE to call Lau-tsze *the* philosopher of China, because, while Confucius has obtained the greater name, he is indebted for it more to circumstances than to deep thinking. Confucius no doubt excelled all his contemporaries as a casuist, a ritualist, and a *littérateur*, but not more than Lau-tsze excelled him in depth and independence of thought. That Lau-tsze went further astray than his more cautious rival is only what might have been expected from his independence. He soared away into regions and heights, where others could neither follow him nor see him; and, while he sometimes lost himself in wandering mazes, it must be confessed that, at other times, he had better success, and came back with a "jewel in his bosom."

How much Lau-tsze owed to his predecessors

we have no means of knowing, beyond the very few instances in which he seems to quote a current maxim, or a traditional saying. That he was familiar with the fragmentary histories, and the ballads of his time, on which Confucius bestowed so much attention, we can hardly doubt; but, as far as we know, his inspiration was not there. If there was really any writer on *Tau*, before Lau-tsze, his work and his name seem to have perished. On this question, and on the other very interesting one—whether the Chinese and Hindu minds came in contact at this early period—we may hope for further light when the subject receives the attention which it deserves.

As a matter of fact, Lau-tsze stands the acknowledged head of the *Tauist* sect; and his followers have scarcely added anything valuable to what he left them in this little book. Speculation there has been, and wild dreaming—superstition and blasphemy too in abundance; but scarcely aught that is worth the knowing.

Then, as to the author of the book himself,

we can scarcely be said to know anything of his life. It extended probably over the greater part of the sixth century B.C. But if he really devoted himself to the benefit of others, according to his principles, the memory of his good deeds has perished. Even his name, Lau-tsze—the Old Philosopher, or the Philosopher Lau—is probably nothing more than a title of respect. Sze-ma Tsien, who lived more than four hundred years after, gives him another name and surname. He also tells us a few things about him, which are of little importance, even if true. The following account, however, of an interview between Confucius and Lau-tsze, is very characteristic of the two. Lau-tsze was treasury-keeper to the Court of Chow, and Confucius went there to make enquiry about the ceremonies and maxims of the founders of the dynasty. They met and freely interchanged their views, when Lau-tsze said to Confucius:—"Those whom you talk about are dead, and their bones are mouldered to dust; only their words remain. When the

superior man gets his opportunity, he mounts aloft; but when the time is against him he moves as if his feet were entangled. I have heard that a good merchant, though he has rich treasures deeply stored, appears as if he were poor, and that the superior man, whose virtue is complete, is yet, to outward seeming, stupid. Put away your proud air and many desires, your insinuating habit and wild will. These are of no advantage to you. This is what I have to tell you." Confucius, when he left him, said to his disciples, "I know how birds can fly, how fishes can swim, and how beasts can run. And the runner may be snared, the swimmer may be hooked, and the flyer may be shot by the arrow. But there is the dragon. I cannot tell how he mounts on the wind through the clouds, and rises to heaven. To-day I have seen Lau-tsze, and can only compare him to the dragon." One can easily conceive how the practical, worldly mind of Confucius would be shocked and repelled by some of Lau-tsze's bold paradoxes; and how

he would cry Danger! A dragon must be an ugly customer to meet in a strange place in the dark.

I have thought it better to leave the word *Tau* untranslated, both because it has given the name to the sect—the *Tauists*—and because no English word is its exact equivalent. Three terms suggest themselves—the Way, Reason, and the Word; but they are all liable to objection. Were we guided by etymology, “the Way,” would come nearest to the original, and in one or two passages the idea of a *way* seems to be in the term; but this is too materialistic to serve the purpose of a translation. “Reason” again seems to be more like a quality or attribute of some conscious being than *Tau* is. I would translate it by “the Word,” in the sense of the Logos, but this would be like settling the question which I wish to leave open, viz.—what amount of resemblance there is between the Logos of the New Testament and this *Tau*, which is its nearest representative in Chinese. In our



version of the New Testament in Chinese we have in the 1st Chapter of John:—"In the beginning was *Tau*, etc."

The highest idea of Lau-tsze—that which with him takes the place of Deity or the Absolute—is expressed in his opening chapter by *Eternal Tau*. He strives to describe his idea as the "sameness" of existence and non-existence—"the abyss of abysses"—"the gate of all mystery;" and, subsequently, by a combination of negatives, and by an accumulation of contraries (xiv. and xxi.).

When he comes nearest to our idea of a Creator, it is still *Tau*, often, however, represented under his favourite figure of a Mother (I., vi., xxv., lII., lIX.). Here the idea of existence generally predominates. Existence is, indeed, said to be produced from non-existence, and *Tau* is the union of the two; but "the Mother" of all things must be a positive Being. Then existence with Lau-tsze is matter. He knows of no other existence but that which has form, and *may* have colour,

sound, locomotion, etc. In its primordial state it is the "the nameless simplicity" (xxxii., xxxvii.); it is "unity" produced by *Tau* (xlii.). In its first and greatest cognizable form it is heaven and earth. Whatever existence there was before heaven and earth, was the Abyss-Mother (vi.); but even this is a forced name: it has strictly no name, and all names are inadequate to express it (xxv.).

Lau-tsze had no notion of spirit as a substance distinct from matter. It may surprise those who are not acquainted with the history of metaphysics to be told that even John Milton, our great Christian poet, knew nothing of a distinct essence of spirits. But this was the case. Angels and souls of men are all made, according to him, from the same stuff by which our bodies are nourished.

"And from these corporal nutriments perhaps  
Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit."  
—*Paradise Lost* (V. 496).

Such also has been the prevailing dogma of the Tauist sect, of which Lau-tsze was the founder;

and it has given rise to endless absurd gibberish about the elixir of life, and the different ways by which a man may turn himself "all to spirit;" and, better still, to the state of emptiness, of which the founder has so much to say.

"Much ado about *nothing*" will almost compel us to believe that it is something. And such would seem to have been the effect of Lau-tsze's talk about the non-existent. Where we should place the soul of man he places *emptiness*. The space between heaven and earth is *emptiness*. *Emptiness* is useful. It is the womb of the Abyss-mother, from which all things flow out into actual existence. In one place he tells us that there is in the heart of everything "an (immaterial) *breath*" (XLII.); but this is, I suspect, after all, but the non-existent, which enters into all things, without exception, or penetrates the impenetrable (XLIII).

Once, indeed, we read of a Spirit, in the viith chapter. The original is very obscure,

and I am not sure that I have hit on the right interpretation ; but it seems to me to contain an acknowledgment that, after all his speculations about *Tau*, and non-existence, and the Abyss-mother, the source of heaven and earth is a Spirit. Probably most readers will think it would have been well if he had rested more in this truth, and recognized a personal God as the highest existence, instead of placing an indefinite, impersonal, and unconscious *Tau* before Him and above Him (iv.).

But the fact that Lau-tsze in his metaphysics strayed far from truth and from common sense, is no proof of his inferiority in that department. Much of our metaphysics is only poetry run mad. And Lau-tsze was a poetical, and not a scientific, observer of nature. The water that bubbled up in the spring of the valley came from he knew not where, and so it came from *nowhere* — from *nothing*. That spring flows on for ever ; a symbol, thought he, of all existence, which continually flows from non-existence. And yet Eternal *Tau* is neither the

one of these nor the other, "but the slumbering possibility of both."

It is a consideration fitted to rebuke and humble the pride of modern intellect, that in the sixth century before the Christian era, a heathen had penetrated about as deeply into the mystery of the Universe as the famous German metaphysician, of whose philosophy the following account is given (SCHELLING, *in Eng. Cyc.*):—

"That Absolute<sup>1</sup> which we cognize only through identification with it,<sup>2</sup> and which we name Deity,<sup>3</sup> is to be regarded in its original condition as neither object nor subject, neither nature nor mind, but is the union,<sup>4</sup> the indifference, the slumbering possibility of both.<sup>5</sup> It has *become* all that exists<sup>6</sup> by a process of self-movement<sup>7</sup> continually potentiating itself higher and higher from the lowest manifestations of what is called matter up to organic existence, and the activity of reason itself in

<sup>1</sup> XXVIII.    <sup>2</sup> XVI., XXIII.    <sup>3</sup> IV.    <sup>4</sup> I.  
<sup>5</sup> II., XIV., XXI.    <sup>6</sup> XXVIII.    <sup>7</sup> VI.

the guise of humanity<sup>1</sup> In this movement of Deity or the Absolute One, which constitutes the life of the universe, there are two modes; first, the expansive movement, or objectivizing tendency by which the Absolute rushes forth, so to speak, into actual existence,<sup>2</sup> and out of the *natura naturans* there comes the whole variety and complexity of the *natura naturata*;<sup>3</sup> and, secondly, the contractive movement, or subjectivizing tendency by which the *natura naturata* falls back on the *natura naturans*<sup>4</sup> and becomes conscious of itself."

Truly the greatest wisdom of man, when he ventures beyond his depth, seems near akin to folly.

But Lau-tsze derives some beautiful moral lessons from nature. What could be finer, for instance, than the lesson of usefulness combined with lowliness, drawn from water, in the ninth chapter? The hard and strong parts of trees stay below to support the weaker parts (LXXVI.); so should it be in human society. The Power which completes all the

<sup>1</sup> XXV.    <sup>2</sup> XLII.    <sup>3</sup> LI.    <sup>4</sup> XVI., LII.

forms of nature does not shew itself ; its beneficent effects alone are seen : so should it be with the good man. A violent wind or a pouring rain cannot last long ; therefore be moderate if you wish to last.

There are few Christians who will not sympathize with, and even admire, Lau-tsze's sentiments on war. And perhaps those on capital punishment will not be taken amiss. At all events, the light in which he regards bad men and criminals, in chapters XXVII. and LXXIV., is a most Christian light. The good men have to make, by instruction and example, other good men out of *these materials*, and he is a sorry workman who despises or destroys his materials.

The maxim in chapter LXIII., "Recompense injury with kindness," was once quoted to Confucius for his approbation, but he could not endorse it. "With what then," said he, "will you recompense kindness? Recompense injury with justice, and recompense kindness with kindness." Lau-tsze occupied here higher ground than Confucius. Confucius always spoke

from the stand-point of a schoolmaster or a magistrate. Lau-tsze's fault lay rather the other way. He saw the hollowness of the education and government of his day, and went to the extreme of condemning all systematic education, all legislation, all official rank, and all executive government. It was on these subjects that he drove his theory of non-action and spontaneity beyond all practical bounds. He was one of the people; and if it had been his lot to instruct and govern others he would have done so, he thought, by simply being the best one among them.

But I will here leave Lau-tsze to be judged by his English readers.

The French translation by M. Julien has been very helpful to me, and I have much pleasure in acknowledging my obligations to its author, whose more elaborate work I have no wish or intention to supersede by this attempt to put the thoughts of Lau-tsze into a readable English dress.



### NOTE TO PAGE 38.

The following is another, and perhaps a better, rendering of part of chapter L. :—

Men go out of life and into death.

Three in every ten (the cautious) are the followers of life.

Three in every ten (the violent and obstinate) are the followers of death.

And three in every ten, while they live, act so as to hasten their death. For why?—they live a life of luxurious opulence.

TAU TĚH KING;  
OR  
THE CLASSIC OF TAU AND OF VIRTUE.

---

I.—*The Embodiment of Tau.*<sup>1</sup>

THE *tau* (reason) which can be *tau*-ed (reasoned) is not the Eternal *Tau* (Reason). The name which can be named is not the Eternal Name.

Non-existence is named the Antecedent of heaven and earth; and Existence is named the Mother of all things. In eternal non-existence, therefore, man seeks to pierce the primordial mystery; and, in eternal existence, to behold

<sup>1</sup> The headings of the Chapters have been added by some Chinese editor.

the issues of the Universe.<sup>1</sup> But these two are one and the same, and differ only in name.

This sameness (of existence and non-existence) I call the abyss—the abyss of abysses—the gate of all mystery.

II.—*The cultivation of the person.*

When in the world beauty is recognized to be beautiful, straightway there is ugliness. When in the world goodness is recognized to be good, straightway there is evil. And thus, in like manner, existence and non-existence mutually originate (or suggest) each other; so also difficulty and ease, long and short, high and low, treble and bass, before and after. The sage accordingly confines himself to what is without effort (not demonstrative). He carries

<sup>1</sup> This difficult passage is capable of another interpretation, which has been adopted by M. Julien:—*That which without a name is the beginning of heaven and earth, with a name is the mother of all things. Therefore, he who is always without passions beholds the mystery; and he who always has passions beholds the issues.* But this, although it is the most obvious sense of the words, does not present the continuity of thought which is apparent in the translation here given.

on teaching without words;<sup>1</sup> and everything works without hindrance. He produces without holding possession. He acts without presuming on the result. He completes his work and assumes no position for himself. And, since he assumes no position, he never loses any.

III.—*Giving the people rest.*

Not exalting worth keeps the people from rivalry. Not prizing things hard to procure keeps the people from theft. Not looking on objects of lust keeps the heart from disorder. The government of the sage consists, accordingly, in emptying the heart (of desires) and filling the stomach; in weakening the will and strengthening the bones; in continually keeping the people from the knowledge and the desire (of evil); and in making those that have the knowledge not dare to act. He acts inaction, and so nothing is ungoverned.

<sup>1</sup> Emerson makes Socrates say, "All my good is magnetic, and I educate, not by lessons, but by going about my business." In his essay on Compensation he has also expanded the idea of Lau-tsze, that "an inevitable *dualism* bisects nature."

IV.—*The Fountainless.*

*Tau* is empty ; in operation exhaustless. In its depth it seems the father (first ancestor) of all things. It blunts sharp angles. It unravels disorder. It softens the glare. It shares the dust. In tranquillity it seems ever to remain. I know not whose son it is. It appears to have been before God.

V.—*The use of Emptiness.*

Heaven and earth have no special love. They regard all-existing beings as sacrificial grass-dogs (figures of grass made for a temporary purpose). The sage has no special love. He regards the people as grass-dogs.

The space between heaven and earth may be compared to a bellows. Though empty, it never collapses, and the more it is exercised the more it brings forth. But the man of much talk is frequently reduced to silence (exhausted). There is nothing like keeping the inner man.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Good is discourse," says Emerson ; "silence is better and shames it."

VI.—*The production of material forms.*

The Spirit (like the perennial spring) of the valley never dies. This (Spirit) I call the Abyss-Mother. The passage of the Abyss-Mother I call the root of heaven and earth. Ceaselessly it seems to endure, and it is employed without effort.

VII.—*Sheathing the light.*

Heaven is long and earth is lasting. That by which heaven and earth are long and lasting, is their not aiming at life. This is the reason why they live long. Therefore the sage puts himself last, and yet is first;<sup>1</sup> abandons himself, and yet is preserved. Is this not through his having no selfishness? Thereby he preserves self-interest intact.

VIII.—*The easy nature.*

The highest style of goodness is like water. Water is good to benefit all things; while it

<sup>1</sup> "Whosoever runs after greatness, greatness runs away from him; whosoever runs from greatness, greatness follows him."

—*Talmud*.

does not strive, but runs to the place which all men disdain. Therefore it is near to *Tau*. Where it abides, it is good for adaptability. In its heart, it is good for depth. In giving, it is good for benevolence. In speaking, it is good for fidelity. In correcting, it is good for government. In serving, it is good for ability. In acting, it is good for seasonableness. And inasmuch as it does not strive no one dislikes it.

IX.—*Equalization*.

It is better to desist than to go on grasping at fulness. Handling and sharpening cannot last long.

When gold and gems fill the hall none can protect them.

Wealth and honour with pride bring their own punishment.

When a work of merit is done and reputation is coming, to get out of the way is the *Tau* of Heaven.

X.—*What may be done.*

By husbanding the animal and spiritual souls, and embracing unity, it is possible to prevent their separation. By undivided attention to the passion-nature, and increasing tenderness, it is possible to be a little child. By putting away impurity from the hidden eye of the heart, it is possible to be without spot. By loving the people, and so governing the nation, it is possible to be unknown. In opening and shutting the heavenly doors (the mouth, the nostrils, etc.), it is possible to have no creaking. One may be bright and transparent on all sides, and yet be unknown.

To produce and to nourish, to produce and have not, to act and expect not, to enlarge and cut not off,—this is called sublime virtue.

XI.—*The use of non-existence.*

Thirty spokes unite in one nave, and by that part which is non-existent (*i.e.* the hole in the centre of it) it is useful for a carriage wheel. Earth is moulded into vessels, and by their hol-



lowness they are useful as vessels. Doors and windows are cut out in order to make a house, and by its hollowness it is useful as a house. So then existence may be said to correspond to gain, but non-existence to use.

XII.—*Restraining the passions.*

The five colours will make a man's eyes blind. The five sounds will make a man's ears deaf. The five tastes will spoil a man's mouth. Riding and hunting will drive a man mad. Things hard to procure will make a man run into harm. Therefore the sage makes provision for the inner man, and not for the eyes. He puts aside the one, that he may take the other in hand.

XIII.—*Avoiding shame.*

Favour and disgrace are as one's fear. Dignity and disaster as one's person.

What I mean to say of favour and disgrace is this:—Disgrace is the lower place, which he who wins and he who loses equally fear; so that (in the struggle for place) favour and

disgrace are (only important) in proportion to one's fear (of failure).

And what I mean by dignity and disaster being as one's person is this:—What renders me liable to great disaster is my person; so that if I had no person (body, personal importance), what disaster could I have?

So then, if, for the sake of dignity, one seeks to make himself ruler of the world, he may be permitted, indeed, to rule it temporarily; but if, for love, one seeks to make himself ruler of the world, he may be entrusted with it (for ever, *or* he may trust himself to the world for ever).

#### XIV.—*The praise of the Abyss.*

What you cannot see by looking at it, is called *plainness*. What you cannot hear by listening to it, is called *rareness*. What you cannot get by grasping it, is called *minuteness*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The three words printed in italics are in the original, *I*, *Hi*, and *Wei*, which some scholars have fancied to be the syllables of the sacred name of God in Hebrew, *Jehovah*, transferred by Lau-tze into Chinese. But the words are translatable, and I see no reason to think that they are not pure Chinese.

These three cannot be examined, and therefore they blend into Unity. Above it is not bright, below it is not obscure. Boundless in its operation, it cannot be named. Returning, it goes home into nothing. This I call the appearance of non-appearance, the form of nothing. This is what baffles investigation. Would you go before it, you cannot see its face. Would you go behind it, you cannot see its back. But to have such an apprehension of the *Tau* which was from of old as to regulate present things, and to know their beginning in the past; this I call having the clue of *Tau*.

xv.—*The manifestation of Virtue.*

The skilful philosophers that were in the olden time had a mystic communication with the abysses. They were deep and cannot be known. And whereas they cannot be known, I strain my imagination to picture them. Timid were they, like one fording a stream in winter. Cautious were they, like one who dreads his neighbour. Circumspect were they,

like a man from home. Vanishing were they, like ice that is about to melt. Simple were they, like unwrought wood. Vacant were they, like a valley. Dim were they, like muddy water.

Who is there that can take the turbid water, and, by stillness, make it gradually clear ?

Who is there that can take what is at rest, and, by continuous motion, make it gradually alive ?

Those who keep this *Tau* desire not fulness. And whereas they are empty, they may wax old, and yet not stand in need of renewing.

xvi.—*Going home to the Root.*

Having once arrived at a state of absolute vacuity, keep yourself perfectly still.

All things come into active operation together ; but I observe whither they return. When things have luxuriated for a while, each returns home to its origin (the root). Going home to the origin is called stillness. It is said to be a reversion to destiny. This re-

version to destiny is called eternity. He who knows (this) eternity is called bright. He who does not know (this) eternity wildly works his own misery. He who knows eternity is magnanimous. Being magnanimous, he is catholic. Being catholic, he is a king. Being a king, he is heaven. Being heaven, he is *Tau*. Being *Tau*, he is enduring. Though his body perish, he is in no danger.

XVII.—*Genuineness.*

In the highest antiquity people knew only of the existence of their superiors. In the next (age) they became attached to them, and flattered them. In the next they dreaded them. In the next they despised them. For where faith is insufficient, it is not met by faith.

How cautious they (the ancient sages) were in weighing their words! When they had completed a meritorious work, and affairs were prosperous, the people all (unconscious) said, "We *are* just as we are naturally."

XVIII.—*Vulgar Attenuation.*

When the Great *Tau* is missed, then men pass on to philanthropy and justice.

It is after wisdom has conferred renown, that there are great shams.

After discord has arisen in families, what are called filial duty and fatherly compassion begin.

And it is not till a nation has got into a disordered state that there are patriots (faithful ministers).

XIX.—*Restoring Genuineness.*

(If some men would but<sup>1</sup>) abandon their *sageness* (*holiness*), and cast away their *wisdom*, the people would be more benefited a hundred-fold.

If they would abandon their *philanthropy*, and cast away their *justice*, the people would go back to *filial duty* and *fatherly compassion*.

<sup>1</sup> This whole chapter is evidently directed against what is called Confucianism, whether it was written after Confucius became leader of the system or before. The next chapter commences in the same strain.

If they would abandon their *skill* and forego their *gains*, thieves would have no existence.

Here are three things, the cultivation of which has been a failure. Therefore let them return to whence they came; and do you appear in your own unadorned simplicity, embracing realities, curbing selfishness, and curtailing ambitious desire.

xx.—*On differing from the vulgar.*

Abandon learning, and have no more vexation. Not much difference, after all, is there between *Aye* and *Yes*. And how much difference do they make between *good* and *evil*? One must, of course, dread what others dread (*i.e.* evil).

But, alas! they will never cease from their madness. All the people are full of ambitious desires, lusting as if for the stalled ox, or for sexual enjoyment.

I am alone in my timidity, and show no sign (of ambition). I am as a child not yet matured. I am forlorn, as if I had no home

to go to. All (other) men have (enough and) to spare; but I am, as it were, left behind. In mind how like I am to the fool! I am all in a maze. The common people are brightly intelligent: I alone seem to be in the dark. The common people are discriminative: I alone am without discrimination. I am tossed as the ocean; I roll as if never to stop. All (other) men have something that they can do: I alone am good for nothing, and despicable. I alone differ from other people, but I glory in my nursing Mother (*Tau*).

XXI.—*The vacant heart.*

Virtue in its grandest aspect is neither more nor less than following *Tau*.

*Tau* is a thing indefinite, impalpable.

Impalpable! Indefinite! and (yet) therein are forms.<sup>1</sup>

Indefinite! Impalpable! and (yet) therein are things.

<sup>1</sup> We have here something like the Platonic doctrine of eternal *ideas*.



Profound ! Dark ! and (yet) therein is essence.  
This essence is most true, and therein is faith.  
From of old until now it has never lost its  
name.

It passes into (or inspects) all things that  
have beginning.

How know I the manner of the beginning of  
all things ? I know it by this (*Tau*).

XXII.—*The increase of Humility.*

“He that humbles (himself) shall be pre-  
served entire.

“He that bends (himself) shall be straightened.

“He that is low shall be filled.

“He that is worn out shall be renewed.

“He that is diminished shall succeed.

“He that is increased shall be misled.”

Therefore the sage embraces Unity, and is  
a pattern for all the world. He is not self-  
displaying, and, therefore, he shines. He is  
not self-approving, and, therefore, he is dis-  
tinguished. He is not self-praising, and, there-  
fore, he has merit. He is not self-exalting,

and, therefore, he stands high. And inasmuch as he does not strive, no one in all the world strives with him.

That ancient saying, "He that humbles (himself) shall be preserved entire," Oh, it is no vain utterance! Verily, he shall be returned home entire (to his origin. See xvi.).

### XXIII.—*Vacancy.*

Be sparing of your talk, and possess yourself. A violent wind will not outlast the morning. A pouring rain will not outlast the day. Who are they that make these but Heaven and Earth? And, if Heaven and Earth cannot continue such things long, how much more will this be the case with man? <sup>1</sup>

Therefore, when a man in all things accords with *Tau*, his accordance with *Tau* identifies him with *Tau*. A man of virtue is identified

<sup>1</sup> "The power which noisily proclaims itself in the storm is less than the silent power which pervades the calm. In proportion as immorality attains perfection, it labours with ever deepening hostility to subvert every trace of virtue, but its utmost spasms of energy fall short of the quiet might appropriate to the self-governed spirit."—*Dr. Harris.*

with virtue. A man of default is identified with default.

Him who is identified with *Tau*, (the community of) *Tau* also rejoices to receive. Him who is identified with Virtue, (the community of) Virtue also rejoices to receive. (But) him who is identified with default, the defaulters also rejoice to visit with default. Where faith is insufficient, it is not met by faith.

xxiv.—*Disagreeable Graciousness.*

A man on tiptoe cannot stand still. A man astride (his neighbour) cannot walk on.

He who is self-displaying does not shine. He who is self-approving is not held in esteem. He who is self-praising has no merit. He who is self-exalting does not stand high.

Such persons are in relation to *Tau*, as the refuse of food or as excrescences on the body to the creature; they are universally loathed. Therefore he who has *Tau* will not stay where they are.

xxv.—*Imagining the Abyss.*

There was something chaotic in nature which

existed before heaven and earth. It was still. It was void. It stood alone and was not changed. It pervaded everywhere and was not endangered. It may be regarded as the Mother of the Universe. I know not its name; but give it the title of *Tau*. If I am forced to make a name for it, I say it is *Great*; being Great, I say that it *passes away*; passing away, I say that it is *far off*; being far off, I say that it *returns*.

Now *Tau* is great; Heaven is great; Earth is great; a king is great. In the Universe there are four greatnesses, and a king is one of them. Man takes his law from the Earth; the Earth takes its law from Heaven; Heaven takes its law from *Tau*; and *Tau* takes its law from what it is in itself.

xxvi.—*The Virtue of Weight.*

The heavy is the root of the light. The still is the ruler of the moving. Therefore the superior man, in his daily course, never departs from quietude and gravity. Though he

possess gorgeous palaces, he dwells calmly at a distance from them.

Woe is me ! that a ruler with ten thousand chariots should conduct himself with levity in the empire ! By levity he loses his ministers, and by restlessness he loses his throne.

XXVII.—*The use of Skill.*

The good walker leaves no traces behind him. The good speaker incurs no blame. The good reckoner needs no arithmetic. The good closer needs no bolts and bars ; and to open after him is impossible. The good fastener needs no cord ; and to loose after him is impossible.

The sage is ever the good saviour of men. He rejects none. He is ever the good saviour of things. He rejects nothing.

His I call comprehensive intelligence. For the good men are the instructors of other good men ; and the bad men are the material of the good men (the material they have to work upon). He, then, who honours not his instructor, and

he who loves not his material, though accounted wise, are greatly deluded.

This is no less important than wonderful.

XXVIII.—*Returning to Simplicity.*

He who knows the masculine (nature), and at the same time keeps the feminine,<sup>1</sup> will be the whole world's channel (*i.e.* the centre of universal attraction). Being the whole world's channel, eternal Virtue will not depart from him; and he will return again to the state of an infant.

He who knows the light, and at the same time keeps the shade, will be the whole world's model. Being the whole world's model, eternal Virtue will not miss him, and he will return home to the Absoluté.

He who knows the glory, and at the same time keeps the shame, will be the whole world's valley. Being the whole world's valley, eternal Virtue will fill him, and he will return home to Simplicity.

<sup>1</sup> "The soul must become a woman."—*Prof. Newman.*

This Simplicity (the primary existence) is what, being distributed, becomes (all the) vessels (forms of existence in the universe).

A wise man, if he embrace it, becomes the chief of governors. For large (liberal) government is that which cuts off or hurts nobody.

XXIX.—*Non-Action.*

When one who wishes to take the world in hand tries to make it (according to his wishes by active measures of his own), I perceive that he will never have done. The spiritual vessels of the world must not be made. He that makes, mars. He that grasps, loses. For in the nature of things, while one goes ahead, another will lag behind ; while one blows hot, another will blow cold ; while one is strengthened, another is weakened ; while one is supported, another falls. Therefore the wise man (simply) puts away all excess, and gaiety, and grandeur.

XXX.—*Diminishing War.*

He who in the use of *Tau* renders assistance to a human ruler, does not use weapons to force

the people. His actions are such as he may well accept the results of (*or*, such as he would wish rendered to himself again).

Where legions are quartered, briars and thorns grow. In the track of great armies, there must follow bad years.

The good soldier is brave in need only (to effect some good purpose). He ventures nothing for the sake of power. He is brave in need, but not a bully. He is brave in need, but not a boaster. He is brave in need, but is not overbearing. He is brave in need, but he cannot be less. He is brave in need, but not violent.

When things reach their highest pitch of vigour, they become old. This is called *not Tau*. What is *not Tau* is soon at an end.

XXXI.—*Ceasing from War.*

Ornamental weapons are not instruments of joy, but objects of hatred to every creature. Therefore he who has *Tau* will not stay where they are.

The superior man in his home makes the



left hand (the weak side) the place of honour. But he who goes forth to use weapons of war honours the right (the strong) hand. They are instruments of evil omen. They are not the tools of a superior man. He uses them only when he cannot help it. Peace is his highest aim. When he conquers he is not elated. To be elated is to rejoice at the destruction of human life. And he who rejoices at the destruction of human life, is not fit to be entrusted with power in the world.

In a prosperous state of affairs, the left side is preferred; and in an adverse state of affairs, the right side is preferred. The adjutant-general takes his place on the left, and the general-in-chief takes his place on the right. Now, I say, this is just the order of a funeral. He who has been instrumental in killing many people should mourn over them with bitter tears. Therefore, those who have been victorious in battle are disposed after the order of a funeral.

XXXII.—*Sagely Virtue.*

*Tau*, as it is eternal, has no name. But, though it is insignificant (so little even as to have no name) in its primordial simplicity, the world dares not make a servant of it.

If a prince or a king could keep this, everything would spontaneously submit to him; heaven and earth would combine to send down upon him refreshing dew; and the people, without orders, would of themselves harmonize together.

If he should ever begin to regulate things with distinctions of names, he would then be getting a name; but he would know to stop at that point, and thereby escape the danger.

*Tau*, as it exists in this world, is like the streams and valleys in relation to the great rivers and seas (see lxvi.).

XXXIII.—*Discriminating Virtue.*

He who knows others is wise. He who knows himself is enlightened.

He who conquers others is strong. He who conquers himself is mighty.

He who knows when he has enough is rich.<sup>1</sup>

He who walks with energy has a purpose.

He who does not miss his proper place continues long.

He who dies, but perishes not, enjoys longevity.

xxxiv.—*How to bear Success.*

Great *Tau* is all-pervading. It can be on the right hand and also at the same time on the left. All things wait upon it for life, and it refuses none. When its meritorious work is done, it takes not the name of merit. In love it nourishes all things, and does not lord it over them. It is ever free from ambitious desires. It may be named with the smallest. All things return home to it, and it does not lord it over them. It may be named with the greatest.

This is how the wise man, to the last, does

<sup>1</sup> "Who is strong? He who subdues his passion. Who is rich? He who is satisfied with his lot."—*Talmud*.

not make himself great, and therefore he is able to achieve greatness.

xxxv.—*The Virtue of Benevolence.*

Lay hold on the great form (of *Tau*), and the whole world will go to you. It will go to you, and suffer no injury; and its rest and peace will be glorious.

(If you have) music and dainties, the passing stranger will stop (at your door).

*Tau*, in its passing out of the mouth, is weak and tasteless. If you look at it, there is nothing to fill the eye. If you listen to it, there is nothing to fill the ear. But if you use it, it is inexhaustible.<sup>1</sup>

xxxvi.—*Secret Intelligence.*

(Nature) when about to contract any creature, is sure first to expand it; when about to weaken, is sure first to strengthen; when about to bring down, is sure first to raise up; when

<sup>1</sup> "The simplicity of nature is not that which is easily read, but is inexhaustible."—*Emerson*.

about to take away, is sure first to give. This is what I call the secret understanding.

The tender and weak overcome the hard and the strong.

As the fish cannot leave the deep (and live), so the warlike weapons of a nation cannot be displayed before the people (without deadly peril).

XXXVII.—*The Practice of Government.*

*Tau* is ever inactive ; and yet leaves nothing undone.

If a prince or a king could keep it, all things would be, of their own accord, transformed (to his likeness).

If during the process of transformation, there should be any manifestation of desire, I would restrain it by the nameless Simplicity.

The nameless Simplicity would also produce an absence of all desire, which would again result in quietude ; and the world would rectify itself.

XXXVIII.—*On Virtue.*

The superior virtue is not (distinguished) virtue, and therefore it has (the essence of) virtue.

The inferior virtue does not lose (the distinction of) virtue, and therefore it has no (essential) virtue.

The superior virtue does ~~not~~ act a part, and makes no pretensions.

The inferior virtue acts a part, and makes pretensions.

The superior benevolence does act, but it does not make pretensions.

The superior justice both acts and makes pretensions.

The superior propriety acts a part, and nobody responds to it (nobody respects it as genuine); so it bares its arm and enacts itself by main force.

Thus it is that, when *Tau* is lost, virtue comes after; when virtue is lost, benevolence<sup>1</sup> comes

<sup>1</sup> *Benevolence* here is the special (partial) "love" of Chap. V. *Justice* and *propriety* are also used in a somewhat technical sense, with a reference to the Confucian or artificial school. See Chap. XIX.

after ; when benevolence is lost, justice comes after ; when justice is lost, propriety comes after. For propriety is the mere skeleton (the attenuation) of fidelity and faith, and the precursor of confusion. Surface-knowledge is the mere show (the flowers) of *Tau*, and the beginning of folly.

Accordingly the great man abides by the solid, and never rests in what is flimsy. He abides by the real, and never rests in what is showy (the flowers). For he puts away the one, that he may lay hold of the other.

XXXIX.—*Taking after the Root.*

The things which from of old have obtained Unity are these :—

Heaven, which by Unity is clear.

Earth, which by Unity is steady.

Spirits, which by Unity are spiritual.

The valleys, which by Unity are full (of water).

All creatures, which by Unity live.

Princes and kings, who by Unity rule the world.

This is all the result of Unity.<sup>1</sup>

Heaven, but for some source of clearness, would be in danger of rending.

Earth, but for some source of steadiness, would be in danger of tumbling in pieces.

Spirits, but for some source of spirituality, would be in danger of annihilation.

Valleys, but for some source of replenishment, would be in danger of drying up.

All creatures, but for some source of vitality, would be in danger of extinction.

Princes and kings, were it not for some source of dignity and highness, would be in danger of an ignominious fall. And here (in this last case) one sees how nobility is rooted in (and entirely dependent upon) what is ignoble; and highness is founded and supported upon what is low. Hence it is that princes and kings speak of themselves as *orphans*, *lonely men*, and

<sup>1</sup> Each of these subsists, and can subsist, *only* as a part of the *Unity* of the *Universe*.



wheelless carts. Is this not an acknowledgement that they are rooted in (and dependent upon) their inferiors? Deny it! Why, a cart taken in pieces is no cart. A man has just as much objection to be isolated like a solitary gem, as to be lost in a crowd, like a pebble.

XL.—*Leaving off Employment.*

Returning<sup>1</sup> is the motion of *Tau*.

Weakness is the character of *Tau*.

All things in the world are produced from existence; and existence is produced from non-existence.<sup>2</sup>

XLI.—*Sameness and difference.*

When the superior scholar hears *Tau*, he diligently practises it. When the middling scholar hears *Tau*, he one while keeps it, another while loses it. When the inferior scholar hears *Tau*, he laughs aloud at it. Were it not

<sup>1</sup> Turning back, retrogression, the opposite of development or progress, which is all a departure from the primordial simplicity of *Tau*.

<sup>2</sup> "Zero is the essence of mathematics. Out of nothing everything arose."—*Oken*.

thus laughed at, it would not be worthy of the name of *Tau*.

Therefore those who have spoken (before me) have said:—

“The bright in *Tau* are as darkness black ;  
 The advanced in *Tau* are as going back ;  
 And their lofty way seems a vulgar track.  
 The highest Virtue is a lowly vale ;  
 The greatest pureness, like the vile canaille ;  
 The vastest talents, those that seem to fail.  
 Established virtue is as stolen away ;  
 The truest essence is as foul decay ;  
 The greatest square has no angles aye.  
 The largest vessel takes long to make ;  
 The loudest voice is what never spake ;  
 The biggest form ne’er a shape doth take.”

*Tau* is hidden, and has no name ; but *Tau* is good at imparting and completing.

XLII.—*The transformation of Tau.*

*Tau* produced one (unity) ; one (unity) produced two (duality) ; two (duality) produced three (trinity) ; and three (trinity) produced all things.

Everything carries the *yin* (shady, dark,

still, deathlike, etc.) on its back ; and the *yang* (bright, active, lively, etc.) on its front ; and is harmonized by an intermediate (immaterial) *breath*.

What people dislike is orphanage, and loneliness, and a wheelless carriage (incompleteness); and yet kings and nobles appropriate these terms. For things, when they are diminished, will increase ; and, when they are increased, will diminish.

What people (by their conduct) teach, I also teach them.<sup>1</sup> Those (for instance) who are violent and obstinate do not die a natural death. I would use such as the best instructors.

#### XLIII.—*Universal use.*

The weakest things in the world will gallop over the strongest. The non-existent enters into (all things) without any crevice (can penetrate the impenetrable). And I by this

<sup>1</sup> "To husband out life's taper at the close,  
And keep the flame from wasting by repose."

understand how useful non-action is. Silent teaching, passive usefulness,—few in the world attain to this.

XLIV.—*Self-Restraint.*

Which is nearest to you, your name or your person? Which is most to you, your person or your goods? Which is the (greater) malady, getting or losing?

Excessive love (of a name or of any other object) must be attended with great personal sacrifice.

Much hoarding must be followed by great ruin (sooner or later).

He who knows when he has enough, suffers no disgrace. He who knows where to stop meets with no danger. These are the people to last long.

XLV.—*Overflowing Virtue.*

He who regards his greatest achievements as unattained, may employ himself without decay.

He who regards his greatest fulness as emptiness, may employ himself without exhaustion.

His greatest uprightness is as crookedness. His greatest skill is as stupidity. His greatest eloquence is as stammering.

Activity conquers cold, and quietness conquers heat ; (but there is a) purity and quietude by which one may rule the whole world.

XLVI.—*Moderation of Desire.*

When the world has *Tau* (when *Tau* reigns in the empire), horses are used only for purposes of agriculture.

When the world has not *Tau* (when *Tau* does not reign in the empire), war-horses are bred on the waste common.

There is no sin greater than giving rein to desire. There is no misery greater than discontent. There is no calamity more direful than the desire of possessing.

Therefore the sufficiency of contentment is an everlasting sufficiency.

XLVII.—*Far-seeing.*

One needs not to go beyond his own door to know the world. One needs not to peep through his window to see celestial *Tau*. The further one goes away (from himself and from home) the less he knows.

Therefore the wise man does not travel for knowledge (knows without travelling); names (describes) things without seeing them; and achieves his purpose without action.

XLVIII.—*The Oblivion of Knowledge.*

Activity (an unhealthy and injurious activity) is daily increased by (efforts at) education. This same activity is daily diminished by *Tau*.

Diminish it, and again diminish it, till there come to be absolutely none of it left. By non-action there is nothing that may not be done. One might undertake the government of the world without ever taking any trouble. And, as for all those that take trouble, they are not competent to the government of the world.

XLIX.—*The Virtue of Indulgence.*

The sage has no invariable mind of his own; he makes the mind of the people his mind.

The good I would meet with goodness. The not-good I would also meet with goodness. Virtue is *good*.<sup>1</sup> The faithful I would meet with faith. The not-faithful I would also meet with faith. Virtue is *faithful*.

The sage dwells in the world with a timid reserve; but his mind blends in sympathy with all. The people all turn their ears and eyes up to him; and the sage thinks of them all as his children.

L.—*Valuing life.*

Men go out of life and into death.

The ministers of life are thirteen (the senses, etc.).

The ministers of death are thirteen.

Human life hastens to the place of death in

<sup>1</sup> The man of virtue has the same *good* for all, and *evil* for none. The author's idea of virtue seems to require him to behave towards a bad man in precisely the same way as towards a good one. But he probably would not have insisted on this to the letter.

thirteen ways (by the undue exercise of the senses and limbs). And why is this? It is because the life men are striving to live is only the gross (physical) life (of intensified activity).

I have heard it said, that a man that is good at taking care of his life may travel over the country without meeting a rhinoceros or a tiger, and may enter an armed host without fearing their steel. The rhinoceros finds in him no place to insert his horn; the tiger finds no place to fix his claw; the weapon finds no place to receive its blade. And why is this? It is because he is beyond the reach of death.<sup>1</sup>

LI.—*Nourishing Virtue.*

*Tau* produces and Virtue nourishes; everything takes form, and the forces bring to perfection. Therefore everything agrees in honouring *Tau* and exalting Virtue. And this honouring of *Tau* and exalting of Virtue

<sup>1</sup> This looks like trifling. We cannot tell whether the author be speaking of some fanciful state of exemption from physical death, or of the immortality of the soul. If the latter is meant, then it would seem that he imagines the soul to be literally killed out of a man by bodily exercise.



is not the result of any command, but is spontaneous for ever. For *Tau* produces, (Virtue) nourishes, enlarges, feeds, completes, ripens, cherishes, and covers all things.

To produce and not possess—to act and not expect—to enlarge and not control—this is called sublime Virtue.

LII.—*Going home to the Origin.*

That which was the beginning of the world may be regarded as the Mother of the world. Having once known the Mother, you may next know the child. And if, knowing the child, you still keep the Mother, though your body perish, you will be in no danger.

Shut the lips and close the portals (of eyes and ears), and as long as you live you will have no trouble; but open your lips and meddle with things, and as long as you live you will not get out of trouble.

To see the small beginnings of things is called clearness. To keep tenderness, I pronounce strength. Use the light to (guide you)

home to its own brightness, and do not give yourself up to calamity. This I call practising eternal (*Tau*).

LIII.—*Getting more Evidence.*

Would that I were possessed of sufficient knowledge to walk in the great *Tau* (Way)! Only the administration (of government) is a fearful responsibility. The great *Tau* is exceedingly plain, but the people like the cross paths.

While the royal residence is exceedingly well kept, the fields may be exceedingly weedy, and the granaries exceedingly empty.

To wear fine clothes, and carry sharp swords—to eat and drink to satiety, and lay up superfluous wealth—this I call magnificent robbery. *This is not Tau*, sure enough!

LIV.—*Cultivating and Observing.*

The good planter (he who plants virtue) never uproots. The good embracer (he who embraces virtue) never lets go. His sons and

grandsons will offer sacrifice to him without ceasing.

Whoever cultivates *this* in his person, his virtue will be true. Whoever cultivates *this* in his family, his virtue will be abundant. Whoever cultivates *this* in his village, his virtue will extend. Whoever cultivates *this* in his kingdom, his virtue will be exuberant. Whoever cultivates *this* in the world, his virtue will be universal.

Therefore by observing myself I know others; by observing my family, other families; by observing one kingdom, other kingdoms; by observing the existing world, other worlds. How do I know the natural course of events in the world, but in this way?

LV.—*Sublime Agreement.*

The man of large-hearted virtue is like an infant whom poisonous reptiles will not sting, wild beasts will not seize, and birds of prey will not strike. His bones are tender, and his sinews weak, and yet he grasps firmly. He is

unconscious of sexual communion, and yet he has the developement of sex. This is the perfection of seminal essence. He may cry all day without injuring his vocal organs. This is the perfection of harmony (in his constitution).

The knowledge of harmony is called everlasting. The knowledge of the everlasting is called brightness.

Fast living daily grows upon a man, and as his mind keeps in exercise the animal spirits, they daily become stronger. But whenever anything has reached its highest point of vigour, it straightway becomes old. This I call not *Tau*. What is not *Tau* soon perishes.

LVI.—*Sublime Virtue.*

They that know don't speak ; and they that speak don't know.

To shut the lips, and close the portals (of the eyes and ears), to blunt the sharp angles, to unravel disorder, to soften the glare, to share the dust,—this I call being the same as deep heaven (the abysses).

Such a character as this is equally incapable of familiarity and of distance, of profit and of injury, of honour and of meanness. Therefore he is the most honourable in the world.

LVII.—*Genuineness.*

Make the upright rule the nation. Make the crafty conduct the army. Make him who takes no measures emperor.

How do I know that this is what ought to be done? I know it from this:—When the world has many prohibitory enactments, the people become more and more poor.<sup>1</sup> When the people have many warlike weapons, the government gets more into trouble. The more craft and ingenuity that men have, the greater the number of fantastical things that come out. And, as works of cunning art are more displayed, thieves multiply.

<sup>1</sup> "Most good legislation now-a-days consists in repealing old laws, which ought never to have been passed. The great fault of our forefathers was that they were continually setting things wrong by intermeddling in matters political, economic, religious, which should have been left alone, to develop themselves in their own way." —

*Kingsley's "Alexandria and her Schools."*

Therefore the sage says, "I do nothing, and the people are spontaneously transformed. I love quietness, and the people are spontaneously rectified. I take no measures, and the people become spontaneously rich. I have no lusts, and the people become spontaneously simple-minded."

LVIII.—*Letting others be Transformed.*

When the government is blindly liberal, the people are rich and noble. When the government is pryingly strict, the people are needy and miserable.

Happiness is ever built up on the back of misery. Misery is ever lurking under happiness. Who knows where this will end?

If one be himself devoid of uprightness, the upright will become crafty, the good will become depraved. Verily, mankind have been under delusion for many a day.

Therefore the sage is himself strictly correct, but does not cut and carve other people. He is chaste, but does not chasten others. He is

straight, but does not straighten others. He is enlightened, but does not dazzle others.

LIX.—*Keeping Tau.*

In governing men and in serving Heaven, there is nothing like moderation. This moderation, I say, is the first thing to be attained. When this is first attained, one may be said to have laid in an abundant store of virtue. With an abundant store of virtue, one may conquer every obstacle. Being able to conquer every obstacle, no limit can be seen to one's resources. And when this is the case, one may have the kingdom.

Such an one has the *Mother* of the kingdom, and may endure long. This I call having the roots deep and the fibres firm. This is the *Tau* by which one may live long and see many days.

LX.—*On Occupying the Throne.*

Govern a great kingdom as you would cook small fry (without gutting or scraping).

When one brings *Tau* with him to the

government of the world, ghosts will not become active spirits. It is not that ghosts will not become active spirits, but the spirits (or ghosts) will not injure men. Once more, it is not the spirits (or ghosts) that will not injure men, it is the sage himself that will not injure men. Forasmuch as he and they do not injure each other, their virtues converge to one beneficent end.<sup>1</sup>

LXI.—*The Virtue of Humility.*

When a great kingdom takes a lowly position, it becomes the place of concourse for the world—it is the wife of the world. The wife by quietness invariably conquers the man. And since quietness is also lowliness, therefore a great kingdom, by lowliness towards a small kingdom, may take that small kingdom. And a small

<sup>1</sup> The meaning of the above rather obscure paragraph is that the good government of the sage lays all ghosts. "He and they" in the last sentence is generally taken to refer to the sage and the ghosts; but I think it more likely that Lau-tze, having eliminated the ghosts in the previous sentence, speaks here of the sage ruler and his subjects. Probably he did not believe in the existence of ghosts or demons such as the vulgar dreaded. The only other reference to spirits is in chap. xxxix.



kingdom, by lowliness towards a great kingdom, may take that great kingdom. So that either the one stoops to conquer, or the other is low and conquers.

If the great kingdom only desires to attach to itself and nourish (*i.e.* benefit) others, then the small kingdom will only wish to enter its service. But, in order that both may have their wish, the great one should be lowly.

LXII.—*The Practice of Tau.*

*Tau* is the hidden sanctuary of all things,—the good man's jewel, the bad man's guardian.

Good words are always marketable. Honourable conduct is always transferable to others. Even if they be not good, where is the need to cast them off?

Therefore, in electing an emperor and appointing his nobles, if those should come bearing jewels before them and mounted on fleet steeds, they are not like the man who takes his seat, holding out this *Tau* (as his recommendation).

For what did the ancients so much prize this *Tau*? Was it not because it was found at once without searching; and (by it) those who had sinned might escape (be pardoned)? Therefore it is the most estimable thing in the world.

LXIII.—*The beginning of Grace.*

Act non-action. Be occupied with non-occupation. Taste the tasteless.

Find your *great* in what is *little*, and your *many* in the *few*.

Recompense injury with virtue (kindness).

Anticipate the difficult by managing the easy.

Manage the great things by taking them while they are small.

The difficult things in the world must all originate in what is easy; and the great things in the world must all originate in what is small. Therefore the sage never attempts what is great, and hence he is able to accomplish great things. He who lightly assents will rarely keep his word. He who has many easy things will have

many difficulties. Therefore the sage views things as difficult and never has any difficulty.

LXIV.—*Keeping to the Small.*

That which is at rest is easily held. That which has not yet appeared is easily provided against. That which is brittle is easily broken. That which is minute is easily dispersed.

Manage your business before it exists (takes form). Begin to regulate before the disorder comes. The tree that fills the arms grew from a slender twig. The castle of nine stories was raised from a mound of earth. The journey of a thousand miles commenced with one pace.

He that makes mars. He that grasps loses. The sage makes nothing, therefore he mars nothing. He grasps nothing, therefore he loses nothing.

People undertake things, and always fail when they are on the point of succeeding. If they were as careful of the end as they usually are of the beginning there would be no failures.

Therefore the sage is ambitious of no ambition ; and he does not prize things difficult to get. He learns no learning ; and only reverts to what others have passed over ; his aim being to promote spontaneity in all things, while he dares not act (upon them).

LXV.—*Genuine Virtue.*

Those who of old were good practisers of *Tau*, did not use it to make the people bright, but rather used it to make them simple. What makes people hard to govern is their having too much policy (wisdom). He who encourages this kind of policy (or wisdom) in the government of a kingdom is the robber of that kingdom ; and he who governs a kingdom without it is a blessing to that kingdom. To know these two things is the very ideal of government ; and a constant knowledge of this ideal I call sublime virtue. Sublime virtue is profound, is immense, is the reverse of everything else ! It will bring about a state of universal freedom.

LXVI.—*Putting one's self last.*

That by which the rivers and seas are the rulers of all the (smaller) valleys is their keeping well down. This is the reason why they reign over all the (smaller) valleys. Therefore the sage, when he wishes to be above (to rule) the people, must, in his language, keep below them. When he wishes to be before the people he must, in his person, keep behind them. In this way, while the sage really occupies a position above the people, they do not feel his weight. And while he occupies a position before the people, they do not suffer any inconvenience. Therefore the world delights to exalt him, and no one is offended.

Because he strives not, therefore none in the world can possibly strive with him.

LXVII.—*Three Precious Things.*

While all the world says I am great, I am, to all appearance, an incompetent creature. But, indeed, if I am great, I appear, for this very reason, to be an incompetent creature.

Those who come up to the (vulgar) standard have existed for a long time as small men.

As for me, I have three precious things which I hold fast and prize. The first is called *compassion*, the second is called *economy*, and the third is called not daring to take the precedence of the world (*humility*). Being compassionate, I can therefore be brave. Being economical, I can therefore be liberal. Not daring to take the precedence of the world, I can therefore become the chief of all the perfect ones.

But in the present day men give up compassion and cultivate only courage. They give up economy and aim only at liberality. They give up the last place and only seek the first. It is their death. Compassion is that which is victorious in the attack, and secure in the defence. When Heaven would save a man, it encircles him with compassion.

LXVIII.—*How to be the Associate of Heaven.*

The man who excels as a commander is not warlike. The man who excels as a fighter is not

wrathful. The man who excels as a conqueror takes no part in war. The man who excels in employing others places himself below them. This I call the virtue of not striving. This I call the power of employing others. This I call being the associate of Heaven—the supreme aim of antiquity.

LXIX.—*The Practice of Sublime Virtue.*

A certain person of military experience has said, "I dare not be the host (to lead on the fight); I would rather be the guest. I dare not advance an inch (to make the first attack); I would rather retire a foot." Now this (principle if carried out) would, I say, result in there being no following of ranks, no baring of the arm, no charging of the enemy, no grasping of weapons.

There is no calamity greater than making light of the enemy. By making light of the enemy, we are almost sure to lose our treasure. Therefore, when opposing warriors join in battle, the pitiful is always the conqueror.

LXX.—*The Difficulty of Knowing.*

My words are very easily known, and very easily practised. (Yet) none in the world can know them, or can practise them. The words have an ancestry, and the things have a Head. But because these are not understood, therefore I am not known. Few are they who know me. Worthy are they who copy me. For the sage wears a coarse garment, and hides his jewel in his bosom.

LXXI.—*The Disease of Knowing.*

The best part of knowledge is (conscious) ignorance. The disease of ignorance is (the conceit of) knowledge. If one only takes this disease for what it is, a disease, he will thereby be free from it. The sage has not this disease, because he takes it for what it is, and straight-way he is free from it.

LXXII.—*The Love of Self.*

When people do not stand in awe of present dangers, they run into greater ones. They should beware of finding their house too nar-



row, and despising their condition of life. If they do not despise it, it will not despise them. This is why the sage, while he knows himself, does not show himself off; and while he loves himself, does not rate himself high. He puts aside the one thing, that he may attend to the other.

LXXIII.—*Freedom of Action.*

One man who has the courage to dare, will be slain; and another who has the courage to restrain himself (not to dare), will survive. Of these two, one seems to have the advantage and the other the damage. But who can tell why either of them should be the object of Heaven's hatred? This is why the sage holds it difficult (to act).

The *Tau* of Heaven does not strive, yet conquers well,—does not speak, yet answers well,—does not call, yet things come of their own accord,—is slack, yet plans well. The net of heaven is very wide in its meshes, and yet misses nothing.

LXXIV.—*The Delusion of Coercing.*

When the people do not fear death, to what purpose is death still used (as a punishment) to overawe them? And should the people be kept in continual fear of death, and I lay hold of those who are not to be so intimidated and slay them,—who would dare? There is always the Great Executioner. Now for any man to act the Executioner's part, I say, it is hewing out the Great Architect's work for him. And he who undertakes to hew for the Great Architect rarely fails to cut his hands.

LXXV.—*The Mischief of Avarice.*

The people suffer from famine by reason of exorbitant taxation. This is the cause of famine. The people are difficult to govern, because their superiors make so much ado. This is the reason of the difficulty. The people make light of death, because they seek to live in wealth. This is the reason of their making light of death.

But only he who takes no measures whatever for life is above all this selfishness (is superior to him who highly esteems life).

LXXVI.—*Against Strength.*

Man in his life is supple and tender, in his death he is rigid and strong. It is the same with everything. Grass and trees are, in their life, weak and tender, and, in their death, withered and tough. Therefore the rigid and the strong are the attendants of death; and the tender and weak the attendants of life. Hence the warrior, when strong, does not conquer. When a tree is strong, it becomes a mere support: the strong and big must stay below, while the tender and weak stay above.

LXXVII.—*The Tau of Heaven.*

The *Tau* of Heaven may be compared to the extending of a bow. It brings down the high, and exalts the low. It takes from those who have over-much, and gives to those who have

not enough. The *Tau* of Heaven takes away where there is too much, and makes up where there is deficiency. Not so the *Tau* of man. Man takes from those who have not enough, to serve those who have too much. Who is the man that, having an overplus, can serve the world with it? It is only he who has *Tau*.

This is the reason why the sage acts and expects nothing; completes his meritorious work and holds no place. He does not wish to show his worth.

LXXVIII.—*Truth to be admitted.*

Of all the weak things in the world, nothing exceeds water; and yet of those who attack hard and strong things, I know not what is superior to it. Don't make light of this. The fact that the weak can conquer the strong, and the tender the hard, is known to all the world, yet none can carry it out in practice. Therefore the sage says, "He who bears the reproach of his country shall be called the lord of the

land. He who bears the calamities of his country shall be called the king of the world."

This is the language of strict truth, though it seems paradoxical.

LXXIX.—*Yielding one's Right.*

When terms are made after a great quarrel, there must be always a remaining grudge. To let matters rest will be found the best way. Therefore the sage takes care of his own part of the compact, and exacts nothing of others. The man of virtue attends only to his promises in the compact. The man without virtue attends only to his claims.

The Tau of Heaven has no favourites (relations). It always gives to the good man.

LXXX.—*Standing Alone.*

(Suppose I had) a small kingdom with few people, and only some tens or hundreds of men available for service,—I would not use them.

I would make the people think death a grievous thing ; and then they would not roam to a distance. Though they might have boats and carriages, they would not ride (away) in them. Though they might have armour, they would have no occasion to put it on. I would make the people return to the use of the quippas (knotted cords),—relish their food,—think their clothes elegant,—rest happily in their homes,—take pleasure in their (own simple) habits. While neighbouring nations might be within sight, and cocks crowing and dogs barking might be within hearing one of another, yet the people would grow old and die, without going and coming together.

LXXXI.—*Substantiality.*

Faithful words are not fine. Fine words are not faithful. The good do not debate. The debater is not good. The knowing are not learned. The learned are not knowing.

The sage does not lay up treasures. The

more he does for others, the more he has of his own. The more he gives to others, the more he is increased.<sup>1</sup>

This is the *Tau* of Heaven, which benefits and does not injure.

This is the *Tau* of the sage, who acts but does not strive.

<sup>1</sup> "A man there was, though some did count him mad,  
The more he gave away the more he had."—*Bunyan*.











